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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

June 3, 1955

MEMORANDUM

TO: S - The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S *MSL*
FROM: EUR - C. Burke Elbrick *CB*
SUBJECT: Current Berlin Highway Situation.

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Current Status

At present truck traffic to and from Berlin is still being maintained at near normal levels through the payment of the increased tolls. On May 20 the three Western Ambassadors met with Soviet High Commissioner Pushkin. Pushkin rejected the Allied complaints by saying that this was a matter within the competence of the GDR and should be solved by discussions between the East and West Germans. He denied that the communist action was a violation of the New York and Paris Agreements in 1949.

German Discussions

Meanwhile, the Federal Republic has been exploring the possibility of technical discussions with the East Germans and has agreed to a meeting of experts from the two Ministries of Transport since the East Germans have refused to discuss this question within the framework of the Interzonal Trade Office. In a meeting in East Berlin on June 2, the West Germans asked whether the purpose of the tolls was to cover autobahn maintenance. The East Germans gave a qualified "yes" answer which was to be clarified today. The West Germans also asked some questions regarding the cost of maintenance and repair of the roads, the proportion of West German traffic on these roads and planned investments by the Soviet Zone in road building projects. The East Germans promised to get the answers to these questions. The East Germans also indicated they would recommend approval of a lump sum payment to cover the tolls. The West Germans reported the atmosphere was friendly and they were somewhat optimistic as to progress made.

Relation with Four Power Talks

Dr. Conant, in a letter to you dated May 21, has recommended that unless this entire issue is resolved satisfactorily, the West should indicate that it will be impossible to hold four-power talks. I believe

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this recommendation should not be followed. Under present circumstances there is no valid connection between the increased highway tolls and four-power talks and were Dr. Conant's recommendation to be followed, world public opinion might easily interpret such a move by us as seizure by us of a flimsy pretext to avoid four-power talks. It may, however, become necessary should the situation remain unchanged to raise this question with the Soviet Foreign Minister.

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